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INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0223
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0333
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0797
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0753
RUEHSR-C/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG PRIORITY 0001
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0738
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0088
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0764
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000822

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA
LONDON FOR LORD, PARIS FOR NOBLES

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: AND THEN THERE WAS ONE: SARG SETS SIGHTS ON
MUHANAD AL-HASANI'S LAST LAWYER

REF: A. DAMASCUS 00780

[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 00787

[1](#)C. DAMASCUS 00788

Classified By: CDA Charles Hunter for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Syrian Human Rights Organization - SWASIAH activist and lawyer Catherine al-Tali (strictly protect) told us on November 24 that the Syrian Lawyers' Syndicate had opened a case against the lawyer and political activist Hasan Abdul Azim. The charges for which the Syndicate was investigating him were, she said, essentially the same as those the Damascus Lawyers' Syndicate had used to disbar Azim's client, Muhanad al-Hasani (ref B). Another of Hasani's original lawyers, Radeef Mustafa, has been absent from Hasani's case since the first disbarment hearing. Tali said Mustafa had been warned away by security services and had retreated to Qamishli -- a small city on the Syrian-Turkish border in the northeastern part of the country. Hasani's third lawyer, Haitham al-Maleh, was arrested last month.

[1](#)2. (C) Word quickly spread, following the Syndicate's announcement of charges, that Azim had stepped away from his two highest profile cases: Hasani and Haitham al-Maleh. Tali, however, contradicted those reports, informing us that Azim was very much engaged, but that the workload -- on top of having to defend himself against the Syrian Lawyers' Syndicate -- had become too much for one person and he sought additional lawyers to handle elements of each case. Tali had agreed, she said, to assist on Hasani's case. She stressed Azim would continue to represent both Maleh and Hasani, though she feared he, too, might soon be detained. "The security does not want Muhanad to have a lawyer at all," she lamented.

[1](#)3. (C) Azim's long involvement in the political opposition may be at the root of this latest SARG use of the Lawyers' Syndicate for intimidation. In a recent meeting, Azim confided to us that he was considering running for a seat in Parliament, which would square with his intention to convoke the Democratic National Rally, create some distance between himself, his party, and the Damascus Declaration (ref C), and perhaps create a protected space from which to operate. However, Tali reported that Azim recently spoke to al-Quds Press about his leadership role in the Arab Socialist Union in an interview broadcast over the radio. His comments may

have, in part, led to the Syndicate's charges, she said.

¶4. (C) Comment: We strongly suspect the Syrian and Damascus Lawyers' Syndicates moved against Hasan Abdul Azim and Muhanad al-Hasani at the request of the SARG's General Directorate of Intelligence, the security service that has led the crackdown on opposition figures since the round-up of the Damascus Declaration National Council in 2007. Azim's ability to remain out of prison will be a good indicator of how successfully he is able to distance himself from the political and humanitarian goals of the Damascus Declaration, and avoid close ideological identification with his two high-profile clients (Maleh and Hasani). The SARG's intimidation of Azim signifies how determined security forces feel in crushing the availability of legal counsel for civil society and democracy activists.
HUNTER